

Review of the Day in the Treatment of Depression

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Generally, people suffering from clinical depression (depression with no specific external cause) are advised to avoid any kind of meditation or practice in which the eyes are closed. People with depression are caught up in their own negative thoughts, lost in their inner world and already too internalized.

Usually, in yoga and meditation practices we try to develop awareness and exploration of the inner world of the mind-psyche and higher consciousness. For depressed persons this is contra-indicated. We need to draw their attention outside to the external world, to external activities and involvement, and thus the usual forms of meditation are not advised.

Yet, learning to observe the mind and its antics and workings is very useful for the depressed person so that he/ she can recognize the patterns of thinking, the negative thoughts and problem-creating type of thinking. So, it is helpful to do some form of practice in which the person can learn to observe the way the mind works, and thus change it or train it to work in a more desirable, positive and self enhancing way. Antar mouna is a very beneficial practice for this purpose. However, in antar mouna, with eyes closed, it is too easy to get caught up in the whirlpool of negative thinking and believing what those negative thoughts are saying, and thus fall into a low mood of depression again and again. If antar mouna can be done in an externalized way, without closing the eyes, with the attention fixed on the path of the thoughts rather than on getting carried away by them, this could be the answer.

Such a method is possible by using an adaptation of 'Review of the day', which is a very simple meditation practice. In 'Review of the day', you mentally review your whole day, from the moment you awoke and got out of bed, through all the activities and happenings of the day, until the time you went to bed at night, or until the time you are actually doing the review. It is as if you are watching a video of yourself living the day. When viewing the events of the day, it is important to avoid making any judgements about the activities or your behaviour, and to avoid getting sidetracked into a train of thought which may arise from one of the incidents of the day.

'Review of the day' is an excellent way of emptying the mind of all the day's experiences. When we sleep this happens naturally in the form of dreams, but by doing it consciously we can more easily and thoroughly clear the 'mental thought bank' of the day's collections. This is especially helpful for those who can't sleep because their mind is racing or worrying.

'Review of the day' also provides a clear-cut path for the wandering mind to follow and

return to easily. By using the technique as an antar mouna type practice, i.e. watching the events and our thoughts, behaviours and actions during the events, we can easily develop a witnessing attitude, or sakshi bhava, which creates the distancing or detachment very much needed by depressed persons or those caught up in the sticky spaghetti or tenacious tentacles of their thoughts.

The practice

Usually 'Review of the day' is done sitting in a meditative posture with eyes closed, first preparing the body and mind for stillness and introspection (pratyahara), and then proceeding to 'unravel the day' by mentally revisualizing everything that has happened. For those suffering from depression, however, 'Review of the day' can be done as a written practice. Sit down with your journal/diary or pad of paper and write down in point form everything that happened (activities, thoughts, occurrences) from the moment you awoke, till the moment you sat down to do the exercise. At first, you might write in full detail and it may take 20-30 minutes. As you get used to doing it every day, you learn to jot down the salient features in point form, covering every event, thought, etc. but with just one or two words, thus getting the full benefit of the practice but not taking ages to do it.

After a few days of writing your 'Review of the day', when you are familiar with the technique, start asking yourself the following questions about your day and answer them in writing. This will help you to go deeper into the workings of your mind and will enable you to change the negative thinking patterns into positive ones. The questions themselves are self-explanatory. Your answers will suggest how you want to change. What new thought patterns or pathways you want to create is up to you. Aim for the best, the highest, the simplest and most positive.

The questions can be adapted to your needs and other ones added that you may find useful.

- What were your first thoughts of the day?
- What would you like to be your first thought of the day?
- What were the anxious moments?
- How did you get out of them? Or what made them pass?
- What would you like to feel during the anxious moments?
- What were the last thoughts of the day?
- What would you like to have as your last thought of the day?
- What would you like to be thinking of as you fall asleep at the end of the day?
- How did you overcome anxieties/negativity today?
- What positive insights or realizations did you have today? Or lessons learnt? Or patterns of thinking or reacting recognized?
- What mistakes did you make in actions, behaviour or thinking?

- What would you choose to do if such a situation came up again?
- Can you recognize any patterns of thinking, actions or behaviour or attitudes? Do you want to change them? If so, in what way?

By doing this practice and answering the questions honestly, the inner healing or purificatory work will happen spontaneously. You don't have to try too hard or worry about what to do.

Further questions

The following questions may also be useful in the treatment of depression and are best introduced after one to two weeks of reflecting on the previous questions daily.

- In what ways can you include more physical movement in routine activities and specific exercise in your life? How can you incorporate them into your life?
- In what way will the written review of the day help you to get over your anxieties and doubts and prevent you from getting into depressed moods?
- Are you finding a shift in your attitudes and the way you view things? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- With the people around you, how can you interact more, spend more time and involve yourself more?
- What positive resolve or sankalpa can you make at this stage of your life? (Repeat it mentally whenever you start or end an activity and write it out neatly filling one to three pages daily or as often as possible.)
- What attitudes can you cultivate to befriend your self, your depression, the people around you, your body, the objects and environment around you, your home, your job, etc?

Other activities for the management of depression

The purpose of all the suggestions is to externalize the mind and stimulate the systems of the body. Have cold instead of hot baths/showers. Eat tasty, spicy foods instead of heavy bland foods. Sing/chant/do japa with the eyes open. Dance, listen and move to music with the eyes open. Practise yoga: shatkarmas, especially kunjla kriya, dynamic asanas and stimulating pranayama. Exercise and engage in non-competitive sports (cycling, swimming, hiking, jogging) and outdoor activities. Perform hard physical work: gardening, washing, cleaning, cooking, etc. Avoid sleeping during the day. Avoid brooding by yourself. Avoid any activities where the eyes are closed. Avoid heavy reading for a long time. Take up a hobby or activity that interests and stimulates you.

Make an effort to be active, outgoing and helpful, to interact with people, to help or serve people, to be cheerful with people (even if at first you pretend, later you will find you really have become cheerful). When you recognize negative thoughts, change them to the exact opposite and know that they are true (e.g. I am hopeless - I am hopeful/I can be hopeful. I am useless - I can be useful sometimes and I can become more useful. I

am sad and lonely - I can be happy and enjoy my own and other people's company).

As depression is a disease/ condition of the mind, it has to be treated with the mind, by training the mind to be a witness, thus distancing ourselves from the depressed mood, and by willfully turning negative self-destructive thoughts into positive, constructive, uplifting thoughts. Meditation is only a temporary relief, a stopgap measure which can give us breathing space to come to terms with the depressed condition. Only retraining the mind can give a deeper, more realistic, on-going solution. 'Review of the day' done in writing is one way to achieve this.